

# EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN A FUTURE UNIFIED KOREA

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of Education.

Chapel Hill  
2005

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## **ABSTRACT**

HYUNJOO YOUN: Education, Democracy and Conflict Prevention  
in a Future Unified Korea  
(Under the direction of Lynda Stone)

This thesis explores the issue of Korean reunification and how education policy might shape a future unified Korea. The guiding conceptual framework is John Dewey's concept of democracy. Moreover, by looking at the education systems of both South and North Korea, educational problems that are pertinent for reunification are described. Through the analysis and discussion of the two current systems, the shape of education in a future reunified Korea is suggested. The conclusion brings focus to the importance of democracy and education reform in order to prevent future conflict that might occur following reunification.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my sincere and special gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Lynda Stone, who has guided me throughout the two years of the M.A program. I especially appreciate her great concern and encouragement in helping me shape and complete this thesis.

In addition, I am grateful to my thesis committee (Dr. Jurg Steiner and Dr. Thomas Farmer), Duke-UNC Center for International Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution, Rotary International, Rotary Counselors (Glenn Hood, Ann Hood and Suk-hwa Kim), and my siblings (Kyung-joo Youn and Kee-suk Youn) for their ongoing support.

Last but not least, for their support, care and love, I am deeply thankful to my parents (Jung-sook Kim and Hee-sang Youn) who brought out the best in me to become who I am.

For education, peace and stability in Korea

## **PREFACE**

The purpose of this thesis is to identify key elements that can be a cornerstone in shaping education for a future unified Korea. In general, many elements from improving the concrete infrastructure to revealing a hidden curriculum might influence the shape of an education system. In this thesis, I would like to suggest some guidelines for shaping an education system specific to a post-reunification context. I will look at the content of the education systems in North and South Korea and current problems. Further by looking at John Dewey's concept of democracy in some depth, and briefly at the concept of deliberation by Jurg Steiner, I will suggest elements that are essential for peace and development in a reunified Korea. As much as it is pertinent to prepare for political, social and economical reunification, it is important to prepare for educational reunification because this will help determine the future culture of a reunified Korea.

The general context for reunification is this: the South Korean government today is preparing for peaceful reunification. Also North Korea has been working on how to bring about reunification. The last decade has seen the most dramatic changes since 1948 when the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was drawn between the two Koreas after its independence from Japan.

This thesis is organized in the following central chapters – Introduction, Democracy for Education, the Education Systems of South and North Korea, Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Evidence for cooperative movement for reunification between both Koreas can be found throughout records of various meetings and cooperation projects. There have been numerous inter-Korean visits, including interaction at the top political and military levels, meetings for separated families between North and South, private investment and tourism at Kum-kang Mountain on the east side of North Korea. For example, magnitude of interest is found from 2005 when more than 40,000 South Koreans visited Mt. Kum-kang.

Reunification is attractive to both Koreas: it will provide both with a chance for further development. For South Korea, the cheap labor force and abundant natural resources of North Korea are very attractive. South Korea's modern technology, economic development and international recognition are very attractive to North Korea. According to a Rand Corporation report *North Korean Paradox* (2005), for both governments, the fact that reunification can alter the expense used for military maintenance, which is 20 to 30 percent of the North Korean gross domestic product and 2.6 percent of the South Korean gross domestic product (see also CIA, 2006), into national development could be one of the strongest interests for both governments. Moreover, politically, reunification can offer stronger legitimacy and authority to current governments because families that have been apart since 1948 will be reunited. This will provide recognition that a reunified government has solved the historical task of reunification, which has roots that can be traced from the Japanese invasion to the Korean War and the creation of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.



When thinking about the right timing for reunification, both Koreas are aware that it will be cheaper for the two Koreas to reunify sooner rather than later. According to Goldman Sachs (Korea Insight, 2005), the later the reunification happens, the wider the estimated cost for reunification will be. If the reunification happened in 2005, the cost would have exceeded 3.6 trillion dollars.

Korean reunification is not only beneficial for the two Koreas; it can also bring peace and security to East Asia. Reunification can potentially eliminate the threat of North Korea using its knowledge of nuclear science and the associated weapons. Continuing six party talks among South Korea, North Korea, USA, Russia, Japan and China is a good example that there is great interest in this region regarding disarming North Korea. Internationally, North Korea has watched what the Iraqi and Afghan peoples have gone through. Both South and North Korea have witnessed the fall of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany. Now, China, since the beginning of new millennium the best ally for North Korea, has opened its door. As China accelerates its national growth and development, the North Korean economy can also improve. There is also potential for democratic change.

If the two Koreas reunite, it would not be strange for South Korea, which has one of the largest economies in the world to lead the reunification process. This might include reforming each government sector, giving advice to organize local government systems, and supporting security in the northern part. There is also interest from South Korea's private sector, which would join in leading development and democratization in North Korea. One reason for South Korean leadership is that the education system has successfully achieved more than 97 percent literacy rate. Also, South Korea has seen the shift of its main industry go from labor intensive to capital intensive industry supported by its educated human

resources. Therefore, South Korea's experience and knowledge in education may well be an important asset in shaping and leading a future unified Korea's education system.

### **1.1 Education**

Throughout their history, education has provided a chance for both Koreas to overcome destruction after the Korean War and has allowed development and unity within each Korea. In this section, a brief overview of how both Koreas have closely tied education to national development is presented. Then, some education problems are raised. The following section then provides a conceptual framework for understanding these problems.

When shaping education for a unified Korea, it should be beneficial for both sides. To do so, it is important to collect knowledge and experience from both, and do a thorough needs assessment when designing the education system, policies and programs. This will allow the peaceful settlement and equitable development of both sides. Just as the general purpose of reunification for peace and prosperity, as stated by Ministry of Unification (1996), education reform for a reunified Korea should focus on peace, conflict prevention and development.

To date, both Koreas have been successful in integrating an educational strategy into national development. On the one hand, although North Korea has been suffering from economic depression and famine since the late 1980s, the longer historical record shows that the country was fairly successful in providing free universal education until the late 1960s. On the other hand, the South Korean government encouraged the production of highly educated human resources through university education, and those people have led the expansion of the economy. However, there are two related problems that hinder reunification.

First, both Koreas' education systems do not allow students to develop and expand their interests in multi-directional ways. South Korean education is test- and grade-driven that entails limitations for human development. While North Korea's education is based on a socialist ideology, expression, sharing and interaction are encouraged only to contribute to the North Korean regime and its leadership. Second, the art of the larger culture yielding to the better argument is generally difficult to find when making decisions. Democratic decision making is also often mistaken as mere majority rule. As a result, policy making for education is driven by external authorities, such as parents and the government rather than the people who are directly involved in education such as the students and teachers. To solve the first problem, addressing the second problem is important as it will lead to interactions for mutual benefit.

As indicated at the outset, in the essay that follows, in a first part the two problems just identified are informed by Dewey's comprehensive conception of democracy for education. Then, the concept of deliberation is taken up. The second part then describes several points of consideration when understanding the education system of both sides. The third part elaborates on the educational problems identified above, and provides reasoning for the need of education reform in a reunified Korea. The thesis concludes with some recommendations for a unified Korean education system that will lead peace and development and prevent conflicts in the future.

## II. DEMOCRACY FOR EDUCATION

### 2.1. Dewey's conception of democracy

The notion of democracy used in the real world is often realized as a way of making political decisions and gathering opinions. When students learn the principle of democracy, it is often summarized as the expression of one's opinion or favor through the act of voting and majority rule. However, because of this simplified understanding and its mechanical practice in reality, a deeper dimension of the concept of democracy is forgotten. John Dewey (1859-1952), an American philosopher, explored this deeper and fundamental dimension of the notion of democracy and its relationship with education. His elaboration of the notion of democracy has quite remarkable practical implications and constructive contributions to learning and educating and it remains theoretically significant today.

For Dewey, the notion of democracy is more than a political system; it is an ethical conception. In an essay from more than a hundred years ago, Dewey (1888/1969) elaborates the ethical conception of democracy and a people-centered perspective of democracy by comparing a popular text of that era (see Dewey, 1888/1969. citing Henry Maine's *Popular Government*) with Plato's *Republic*. Extending the common idea of democracy as mere vote, Dewey emphasizes that the 'act of voting' is not an impersonal mechanism of expression but is a projected tendency of the individual in the society. This idea is important because the idea of voting as voting is a human act and a personal expression. Even minor votes should be respected and valued. He also implies that when it comes to voting, only 'pure'

preferences should be projected regardless of the occupation, social status, wealth, power, or political interest of the voter. According to Dewey (1888/1969, p. 233) “A man when he comes to vote does not put off from him, like a suit of old clothes, his character, his wealth, his social influence, his devotion to political interests, and become a naked unit.”

In his conception, ‘majority rule’ means that it is not rule by a numerical majority of votes, but rather a realization of the representative preferences of a group. Often times, political leaders legitimize certain decisions by trying to promote a majority vote by any means. Even though certain political decisions are not fair or just, when a decision is based on majority vote, people find it difficult to give proper reasons to oppose the decision and just yield to whatever is decided. For Dewey, majority rule becomes meaningful only when the process of shaping a majority is recognized as significant. He writes,

the heart of the matter is found not in the voting nor in the counting the votes to see where the majority lies. It is in the process by which the majority is formed. The minority are represented in the policy which they force the majority to accept in order to be a majority; the majority have the right to rule because their majority is not the mere sign of a surplus in numbers, but is the manifestation of the purpose of the social organism (Dewey, 1888/1969, p. 234).

For Dewey, it is very important for individuals in the community to communicate, interact and discuss. Frequent contact and interactions are the most efficient and proper way to share and expand common interests. Therefore, Dewey explains that when people genuinely interact based on their true preferences and interests, it will naturally show that a group’s genuine preference is not politically manipulated. This constitutes an authentic majority. Dewey believes in the infinite possibility of human beings, and he believes in the power of an educated multitude.

## **2.2. Social interaction, democracy and education**

In the process of interaction, it is important for each individual to have her/his own vision that supports self-guidance to their own beliefs and connects to their ideals for the society. This is accomplished through interaction with the same amount of respect and reciprocity for all constituencies in the society. In Dewey's view, an individual's vision and personal characteristics interact with an environment, network with other people, and intermingle with other cultures and values. The individual's value and vision are based on the result of this interaction – experience - and they keep working to achieve the vision and ideal. It is the process that is projected in the end, and it is the end that is projected through the process, the means. To do so, Dewey emphasizes personality and positive/healthy experience. He explains, “to say that education is a social function, securing direction and development in the immature through their participation in the life of the group to which they belong, is to say in effect that education will vary with the quality of life which prevails in a group” (Dewey, 1916, p. 288).

Furthermore, when Dewey defines positive interaction and experience, he does not necessarily mean conflict-less, peaceful experience. He says, “conflict of peoples at least enforces intercourse between them and thus accidentally enables them to learn from one another, and thereby to expand their horizons” (Dewey, p. 292). Therefore, just like in the interaction and expansion in an organic unit in biology, each individual's will, personality, characteristics and active engagement link to foster the best end. Bearing an ideal in mind, in this process lies the core of the definition of the constructive educational experience. Dewey also points out the danger of external authority: for a healthier and more productive interaction and experience, any external and artificial authority that tries to control and direct

characteristics projected through individuals should be avoided.

Through this democratic experience, he argues that “more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond” (Dewey, p. 292). In this regard, he talks about characteristics of private-personal and public-shared interests. According to Dewey (1927), on the one hand representative interest is a shared interest among different groups in a society. It is a non-political interest that is ‘represented’ through the unity among the group. On the other hand, private interest is the interest that an individual desires in order to serve his/her primary affiliation. It is a political interest that is different from another group’s interest. Disharmony and problems occur when representative and private interests conflict. He says that problems are created if politicians exercise private interests over public interests. To avoid this, Dewey suggests one of the well-known characteristics of political democracy, i.e., frequent election. Dewey emphasizes that through democratic processes, people can arrive at an agreement that they identify as common interest.

Another issue regarding varying interests is the relationship with security. Many different interests sometimes collide with national sovereignty. Returning to the Maine text cited above (see Dewey, 1888/1969, p. 226), according to Dewey, the author argues that national sovereignty is at stake and a country becomes insecure if it is under a particular form of the democratic political system. According to Maine, ‘it is “the most fragile and insecure” of governments; since its introduction government is more instable than it has been since the time of the Pretorian Guards.’ Maine critiques ‘democracy’ as the most unstable form of political system because he believes that sovereignty lying in an ‘n’ millionth of people is too scattered. Dewey views sovereignty in a different way. For him, the sovereignty of each

person checks and balances each other, resulting in harmony within the society. Therefore, Dewey supports democracy as the most stable system.

Dewey supports democracy with a specific conception of association. He writes about how human beings associate in society and community and offers a definition of the former. He explains that humans associate with each other in various ways and for many different purposes. Within an associated group in society, one person's way of associating in the community is different from another's way. Even in one society of the same culture and geographical boundary, there are different groups with different aims – political parties, groups that are bound by blood, or by business purposes, and other various partnerships. Dewey points out that a society becomes united through values such as unity, praiseworthy community of purpose and welfare, loyalty to public ends, and mutuality of sympathy. In reality within any one society there are many (Dewey, 1916, p. 289). His point too is that within society, there are forces that both unite and differentiate.

Within a society, Dewey also distinguishes healthy and unhealthy groups through examples of gang and family. He gives gangs as an example of a group banded together for criminal purposes that is very different from other groups in society. However even within a gang society, there are praiseworthy qualities. He writes, "There is honor among thieves, and a band of robbers has a common interest as respects its members. Gangs are marked by fraternal feeling, and narrow cliques by intense loyalty to their own codes" (Dewey, 1916, p. 289). Further, he compares a gang group to a family: "Family life may be marked by exclusiveness, suspicion, and jealousy as to those without, and yet be a model of amity and mutual aid within" (p. 289). He emphasizes that the education given to the group plays a key role in the socialization of its members. Further, the quality and value of the socialization



depends on the habits and aims of the group.

To improve society to become more harmonious and contributory to the broader society, the key is to find the common interests shared within and among groups, and how various forms of association and interaction are exercised fully and freely. To return to the example above, the interaction levels, and types and range of interests are very different between a gang and a family. Here Dewey is worth quoting at length:

the education such a society (criminal group) gives is partial and distorted. [In contrast, in] the kind of family life which illustrates the standard, we find that there are material, intellectual, aesthetic interests in which all participate and that the progress of one member has worth for the experience of other members – it is readily communicable – and that the family is not an isolated whole, but enters intimately into relationships with business groups, with schools, with all the agencies of culture, as well as with other similar groups, and that it plays a due part in the political organization and in return receives support from it (Dewey, 1916, p. 290).

A final move is to define a healthy democratic society using Dewey's notion for the ideal society. For him, a healthy society is a one where “many interests are consciously and continuously communicated, interacted and shared, and there are varied and free points of contact with other modes of association” (Dewey, 1916, p. 290). Dewey also talks about the ethics in interaction processes. According to him, “In order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences” (p. 290).

Briefly applying Dewey's idea of democratic association is useful. A common value of the characteristics of Korean society is Confucianism. Social order in a Confucian society is based on age, social status, and education level. Age is one of the most important factors in Korean society. Language usage in interactions between older people and younger people is

different, so Koreans immediately identify each other's ages. This has had a negative result of discouraging younger people to speak out about their interests or concerns. In the south, the situation has changed somewhat with the infusion of democracy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It provided legitimacy to the gathering of people's opinions and to using democratic power when speaking out for interests. Through the legitimating process, political democracy has been established, but this more general democratic way of association has achieved limited success. To facilitate Dewey's democratic conception of association and interaction ones interests, and an ethics and manners of deliberation is necessary for the Korean context.

### **2.3. Deliberation and democratic opinion sharing**

Deliberative politics has deep roots in Ancient Greek philosophy. Quality of argument was important to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The concept of deliberation in this paper follows the work of J rg Steiner (2005) who is influenced by contemporary German philosopher J rgen Habermas in emphasizing the importance of the public sphere. Arguably, the concept of a public sphere updates Dewey's conception of association.

According to Steiner (2005), deliberative politics is an interactive decision making process in which participants in a dialogue interact based on understanding and communication and not based on egoistical and calculative thinking. In the process, there is no fixed end-point and, until there is harmonious or common unity, the dialogue should continue. Further, even when the common interest is reached, it should be put into further question when a better argument emerges. In other words, dialogue is always open. In posing this ideal process, it seems like everyone is eager to fulfill their own interests. By looking at the characteristics of the concept of deliberation and the differences between bargaining and

deliberation, both Koreas might be able to determine whether deliberative politics is possible only theoretically or whether it could be used in real political praxis.

The characteristics of deliberation are well illustrated by Steiner (2005). They are participation of all in an equal manner (p. 19), argument of what is in mind, truthfully (pp. 19, 20), argument with structured manner so that the argument can appeal universally (pp. 21, 22), speaking for common interest (p.22), willingness to listen to others with respect (pp. 22, 23), and willingness to yield to the better argument with an open mind (pp. 23, 24).

More precisely, the first characteristic talks about the participation of all individuals equally. Every person participates as an independent individual with a mindset ready for deliberation. The second characteristic refers to the importance of arguing what is in each person's mind. To do this, each participant speaks honestly and truthfully so that all other participants will know his/her true intentions. The third characteristic concerns the manner of argument, saying that all participants argue in a logical manner, making it easier for everyone to understand. This is furthered by having good public speaking ability and good argumentation skills. The fourth characteristic requires that participants align their own interests when seeking a common interest. According to Steiner (2005, p. 21), the aim is that "his or her self-interest is compatible with the common good or even contributes to the common good." This fourth characteristic is closely linked with the second characteristic. The fifth characteristic requires that participants are willing to listen to others with respect. The idea is this: ideally, even though another participant's argument is in conflict with my interest, I should be able to listen to him or her with respect. The last characteristic is about willingness to yield to a better argument. Elaborated because of importance, this requires flexibility and open-mindedness from the participants. When they encounter a better

argument that reveals better wisdom, they should be mature and deliberative enough to yield to the argument that best represents the common interest. An example is the case of helping the less-advantaged. Yielding to the force of the better argument is better understood when comparing bargaining and deliberation.

Deliberation differs from bargaining because the instrument of bargaining is punishment and reward. However, in ideal deliberation, participants reciprocate with voluntary and rational reasons rather than reward or punishment. This concept of deliberation is a much more mature concept of interaction that values voluntary and genuine participation. Adding to Steiner's conception, one more element, it seems, is reciprocity. In deliberation, participants reciprocate something that is of higher quality than what is exchanged in bargaining. In deliberation, satisfaction, happiness and a feeling of doing good is exchanged. For example, a participant who yields to the better argument also walks away with the self-satisfaction that he/she is intellectual, civilized, and mature enough to yield. In a group process there are personal rewards.

The next chapter illustrates how the purpose and process of democracy and education are to be realized in the educational context of both Koreas.

### **III. THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF SOUTH AND NORTH KOREA**

#### **3.1. Systems of schooling**

A US Library of Congress country report on North Korea (1993) shows that the North Korean school system consists of 1 year of kindergarten, 4 years of primary school (ages 6 to 9), 6 years of senior middle school (ages 10 to 15), and 4 to 7 years of university. According to the Korean Educational Development Institute (2004 a) of Korea, North Korea provides 11 years of state-financed compulsory education, including 2 years of kindergarten, 4 years of elementary school and 6 years of middle school, from pupils ages 6 to 17. Along with free compulsory education, the North Korean government provides textbooks and curriculum. Education is planned and designed by the government and sometimes uniforms and educational facilities are also subsidized.

According to the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI, 2004 a), since the 1980s, the North Korean government started to supply textbooks and materials by collecting school fees because of economic difficulties. Since the 1990s, the quality of textbooks and materials has declined, and supplies often run out quickly without reaching most students. Also, due to severe famine, there is high absenteeism in schools. Those who come to school are either asked to do some labor around the school or local community area, or they only stay for a few hours at the school and return back home.

Korean Educational Development Institute records (2004 b) show that with regard to university entrance age and admission process, according to a North Korean cabinet decision

in December 1949, anyone between the ages of 17 and 35 who has graduated from high school or equivalent special schools is eligible to enter university. The entrance exam is planned and executed by the government, and nominations for scholarships are similarly decided. According to KEDI (2004 c), on February 27, 2006 North Korea held the first national competitive exam for university entrance, but it had many problems due to corruption and bribing during the selection process. For the entrance exam, North Korean students must study the revolutionary history of the former leader, Il-sung Kim and the current leader, Jung-il Kim. At university, North Korean students must attend classes and participate in class-related experiments or exams. University completion and graduation is also administered and decided by the government through national exams for graduation.

The South Korean school system consists of 1 or 2 years of kindergarten, 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of middle school, 3 years of high school and 2 to 4 years of university (MOE, n.d.). University entrance is at the age of 19 or 20. In contrast to North Korea, there are many textbooks per subject that are certified by the Ministry of Education. Usually, individual schools decide on which textbooks to use with their students. School teachers are trained to integrate their curriculum decisions with national curriculum guidelines.

Looking at compulsory education, the South Korean Education system consists of 9 years of compulsory education, including 6 years of elementary school and 3 years of middle school. In contrast to North Korea, there are no school fees for elementary school, but there are for middle school. Recently, starting in small suburban areas, the number of middle schools receiving national subsidies for school fees is increasing. Although kindergarten is not categorized in compulsory education, the majority of Korean children of pre-schooling

age attend kindergarten for 1 or 2 years. High school is also not part of compulsory education but over 99 percent of students completing middle school attend high school. Furthermore, 74 percent of students who attend high school proceed to higher education, including university (KEDI a, 2004).

In terms of entrance into university, all students are eligible to take the national exam for university entrance as long as they have passed through an equivalent educational process from elementary, middle and high school by regularly attending classes or passing each school level through national qualification exams. Depending on school performance, grades, entrance exam scores and extracurricular activities, students enter universities that they desire to attend.

The university entrance selection process in South Korea is also designed by the government, and every university must follow these national decisions for the entrance criteria, which include grade point average, national exam, extracurricular activities, and awards won in national competitions or contests. Individual universities decide the weight of each admission criteria. The Korean national exam for university entrance is called the 'College Scholastic Ability Test'. The test is developed, administered and implemented by the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE, n.d.).

### **3.2. Purpose of education**

South Korean education is now in the Seventh Curriculum that focuses on students' self-realization and the making of a harmonious society through education. The Korean Ministry of Education introduced the Seventh Curriculum on Dec. 30, 1997, and it specifically aims to prepare students for an era of globalization and a knowledge-based

society, adopting the government's national policy. The Ministry's homepage relates, "the Seventh Curriculum is a student-oriented curriculum emphasizing individual talent, aptitude, and creativity, unlike the curriculum of the past" (MOE, n.d.).

What is a striking difference between the two education missions is the ideological tone from North Korea. The latter focuses on building a human being who joins the movement for the Socialist Revolution. According to Il-Sung Kim in his book *Theses on Socialist Education* (1977) quoted in the country report about North Korea (US Library of Congress website about North Korea, 1993), political and ideological education are the most important parts of a socialist education, and a big part of North Korean education is to shape students into revolutionaries who can carry out revolutionary tasks as communists. According to the US Library of Congress website, "Only through a proper political and ideological education is it possible to rear students as revolutionaries, equipped with a revolutionary world outlook and the ideological and moral qualities of a communist."

In its mission, North Korea emphasizes scientific and technological education as well as physical education. Further, education is defined as a "total experience" that not only includes formal school education but also extracurricular activities called "social education" and work-study adult education. North Korea also believes that continuing education for all members of society is critical to building socialism and communism.

According to the North Korean document 'Socialist Education Program' quoted in the article from KEDI cited above (2004 a), education in North Korea is to prepare people to become independent and creative and to develop as leaders of the revolutionary socialism movement. This means possessing a 'labor spirit'. For some, this means being a member of the privileged labor party. Therefore, the content of education is heavily concentrated on



education of the political ideology. In sum, the North Korean government believes a good education should be developed as it leads students to become ‘elites’ who are aware of the meaning of the socialist revolution, who can become communistic human beings.

In this regard, it is also important to educate students to hate enemies who are against the socialist revolution. The KEDI document emphasizes that it is important to equip them with thoughts to hate foreign imperialism, and the landlord and capitalist class. Further, students should devote themselves to fighting against these enemies.

### **3.3. Role of teacher and teacher education**

The contrasting mission of education in South Korea is seen in its conception of the teacher. In general, the teacher’s role is to be a facilitator and a transferer of knowledge. In the ideal, teachers are to be models for students. Interestingly, except for the ideological differences, the ‘subject’ of teacher education looks the same. In both South and North Korean teachers learn education psychology, teaching methodology, curriculum development and design. According to KEDI (2004 d), the major difference is that political ideology makes up 15% of teacher education that is used for other purposes in the South. To become a teacher in North Korea, one must graduate from a teachers college. For those who are not attending teachers colleges, a teacher certificate exam after completing additional classes that are the same as what teachers college student takes are necessary if one wants to become a teacher (KEDI, 2004 d)

South Korean teachers are selected based on a national competitive exam. In order to be eligible, they must graduate from a teachers college or complete the required classes in order to acquire a national teaching certificate. Those necessary classes are offered in most

universities. But there are limitations, for example, at Hoseo University, a private university in Korea, only a small number of spots are available to earn a teaching certificate. Therefore, students who have successfully taken and passed the course (grade point average B) are qualified to take the teaching certificate tract as a minor degree. Both pre-teachers who have graduated from teachers college and who minored in the teaching certificate must pass the national competitive exam to work in public schools. To work in private school, only a certificate is required and hiring depends on the school principal and policy.

### **3.4. Decision Making**

Perhaps the greatest difference in South and North Korean education, and in the culture at large, concerns what might be called ‘national’ vocabularies. This basic difference has a strong effect on each education system and impacts possible reunification. This refers to the Korean language and its origin. South Koreans understand that the Korean written language was developed by Sae-Jong, the Great King in 1443, and its original name is “Hun-min-jung-em”, which means “righteous written words and sounds that help people to learn and understand” (The Hangul Foundation, 1995). The date when the contemporary Korean written language was officially proclaimed is October 9, 1443, a day for celebrating the birth of the Korean language in South Korea. Further, South Korean people understand language as a tool for communication and sharing ideas. In contrast, North Koreans understand the Korean language as the ‘cultural language that the great leader Ill-sung Kim has found, protected, and developed for the people’. The national celebration day for the Korean language for North Koreans is January 15th. Thus, the North Korean people understand language as a powerful tool to promote socialist revolution and development.

As seen above, interpretation and usage of language entails a political and ideological agenda in North Korea that can be a barrier for deliberation for decision making in a reunification context. Understanding how each side conceives of language helps facilitate understanding of what to do when communicating for decision making.

### **3.4.1. General processes**

In North Korea's educational curriculum, tests, content of education and other decisions in education are planned and decided by the Labor party. According to KEDI (2004 e), the North Korean system of education administration is divided into two branches, which are the unit for policy establishment and the unit for policy implementation. However, in reality, major planning and decisions are made during the official Labor party meetings and, then, specific decisions are handed down to the Education Commission to execute. At the local school level, school principals must consult with authorities from the central Labor party and other local authorities about making decisions for education and schools.

In South Korea, educational curriculum, tests, content of education and other decisions in education are advised by the Ministry of Education. It is up to each province and school to decide whether they will follow national decisions and how far they will apply national advice. At the school level, the school principal is the highest authority. Although decision making on a local and school level is allowed, because of the national competitive exam for university entrance, most schools work with similar textbooks, curriculum, programs, and tests, and based on similar school calendars. Usually, most decisions are made by the school principal, but depending on the relationship the school has with the parents association, some school decisions are made through local participation. In some cases, a

school-parent-board has power over school decisions because of great financial contribution from parents.

One final point is pertinent. Information about actual curriculum for reunification in North Korea seems unavailable. In contrast, South Korea has education curriculum for reunification that is developed by the Ministry of Unification (MOU). There are curriculum and teaching materials for each school level from elementary to high school. The content and curriculum of education for reunification is developed to integrate into regular classes including social studies, history, politics and geography classes. In the south there are also national and private websites for education about reunification, such as that of the Cyber Reunification Education Center by Ministry of Reunification (2003).

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

In the previous chapters, Dewey's conception about democracy and education, Steiner's conception of deliberation, and the education systems of both South and North Korea were explored. This chapter's purpose is to discuss the problems of both Korean education systems as an opportunity for future change.

Education is a tool that can bring power and wealth to individuals in both societies. In the past, education had the power to differentiate one group from another in both Korean societies because it was used to create class and wealth through which individuals differentiated themselves from others. Today, reformed education in both societies has some power to overcome social barriers and tear down invisible class divisions that are based on wealth and family background. However, this does not mean that education has completely obliterated social hierarchy; indeed, this differentiation still exists.

Both the South and North Korean governments try to provide education to maximize their citizens' capacity and development as educated human beings. Governments typically design education policy and strategy to aim for capacity building and human resource development. Both national systems focus on test-results, so that an entire education industry exists to get the best scores for students. This takes place across ideological differences.

When looking at South Koreans' pursuit for self-realization through education, there are several obvious directions and pathways to success. These include going to top universities, selecting particular medical, business and law schools, earning a great deal of

money and so forth. The first stepping stone for this ‘right direction’ is determined by how well one does in the national university entrance exam. No matter how diverse after-school programs and curriculums are, because of the standardized national university entrance criteria, a collective message is that one must do well on the exam and fulfill the selection criteria. Almost every year, percentages for specific entrance criteria are changed that makes the system even more threatening. In effect, the South Korean education policy for university entrance exam limits interaction and experience that might be more democratically shared among students and professionals. The system remains in place because some have gone through such passages – getting good grades, receiving pride from parents, attending a good university to achieve personal and social success and to live without worrying too much about financial status. Overall a collective social belief exists that success and self-realization through education is achieved through good grades and the university entrance exam. One result has been the encouragement of the market for private education institutes that have been fueled by parents’ and students’ needs and desires to fulfill evaluation criteria and achieve the best scores in the subjects important for evaluation. In the private education market, only organizations whose students achieve high scores survive competition. This industry continues to be very lucrative and is growing.

To look at North Korea, the society is governed by a dictator and its despotically governed state. Even within this society, however, there are diverse interests and interactions. For example, there are those active in artistic and intellectual expressions, although their work is limited to praising the national ideology and its leadership. As indicated above, the way authorities unite the people is through ideology education that gives consecrated authority to the governing party and its leader.

It is important to emphasize that in North Korean society free opinion sharing is systematically discouraged through education and reinforcement – rewards and punishments. According to testimonies of escaped North Korean refugees in South Korea, an example of limiting information has occurred. It is conventional today for North Koreans to believe that South Koreans are so poor that people are begging on the streets and that the South Korean government is controlled by the US. North Korean students are not expected to think differently than what they have been taught. They are also encouraged to report to the teachers or Labor party personnel if their parents are making false statements about North Korean society, the regime, or their leaders, and other subversive matters.

Further threat occurs when a person is accused of being a rebel to the regime. It is often the case that he or she is denounced in a public forum, subject to corporeal punishment or even capital punishment. It is difficult to encourage free opinion sharing and interaction among the members of the society in the North Korean context. A relevant quote paraphrased from Dewey's work aids understanding. In the North Korean context,

stimulation and response are exceedingly one-sided. [In contrast, in] order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves. And the experience of each party loses in meaning, when the free interchange of varying modes of life-experience is arrested" (Dewey, 1916, p. 290).

In a one-sided context, Dewey continues about the danger of appealing to fear and isolation. He writes, "Instead of operating on their own account they are reduced to mere servants of attaining pleasure and avoiding pain" (Dewey, 1916, p. 290). This quote summarizes how the fear and isolation affects people in North Korea.

The greatest fear for South Korean students is not getting good marks in all

categories for university entrance, which include grade point averages and teacher reports, scholastic aptitude test scores, essay writing, certificates, and recommendation letters.<sup>1</sup> For North Korean students, fear is everywhere at any time – food, security, financial status, regime, and so forth. Increasing numbers of refugees and their testimonies are clear evidence of this.

In both Korean societies, at school, in textbooks, and from adults, students hear that it is important to do one's best, to use creativity, and to develop one's character and talent. Even North Korean education policy talks about the importance of creativity. The daily life experience of students of both Korean revolves around achieving the best scores no matter what. This means sleeping only 4 hours a day to study, taking as many extra lessons as possible after school (South Korean students); and to be 'politically right' within the regime's ideology and guidance (North Korean students). Actually, all Korean students are encouraged to be obedient to the society.

The core problem here is not only about the policy or about the regime; what undermines education and students' potentials is 'fear'. In both societies, students are stimulated by fear, and for most the purpose of studying and doing their best in school has little meaning. As Dewey points out, students are isolated. Many of their interests are limited. Interaction, sharing, and varied and free points of contact with other modes of association in the society are rare. Even where there is some local autonomy, students, teachers and educational institutes have little power over educational decision making that would

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<sup>1</sup> I taught English from 1995 to 2004 to over 250 elementary and secondary school students as a private tutor, public school teacher, and private English institute teacher. I also went through 12 years of elementary, middle and high school. I have interacted with hundreds of friends during those times. I can firmly say that the principal fear for South Korean students is whether they have received good grades. South Korean students know that good marks will not only make them happy but also make their parents happy as they facilitate going on to higher education program.



encourage motivation and empowerment. On both sides, education policy makers should think about whether such policy is aiming for convenience in management or aiming for the vibrant and active development of students. These do become matters of democracy.

Not only does policy matter, but also who interacts in the policy arena. Similar elements, fear and external authority that do not foster students' democratic development can be found in every society. The USA also has the SAT exam for university entrance and grade point average plays an important role in university entrance. Students in the US also worry about getting good grades and about going to high ranked universities. Every society has peer pressure and people who constantly think about what is appropriate for his/her society.

At this point, a summary statement about Korean particulars is useful as it contextualizes recommendations to follow. One South Korean issue is that most students want to attend top universities in Seoul, and the capital city is where all the activity happens. In fact, in both Korean societies, there is a preference towards the capital city because historically it was a center of everything – education, culture, economy and politics. More generally and historically, a second issue is that the Korean culture of Confucianism emphasizes education and legitimizes adults as authorities because children are immature and their reasoning still needs to grow. Even in the south today, most students' parents are members of the second generation after the Korean War, whose own parents went through the Japanese invasion in the early 1900s, the Korean War in 1950s, the great famine in the 1960s, and economic and political turmoil until the 1980s. These parents' habitual comments to their children are 'if you do not want to go through what I have done to feed our family, you should study hard and become an educated elite.' Across both nations people, culture, time and history matters when looking at the result of what in actuality are similar educational

policies.

As preparation for recommendations to follow, here is a summarizing example. Because people play key roles in policy, the government should put more emphasis on identifying needs and characteristics of its changing people and society when designing and implementing policy. Policy should not only guide society to be stable but also to overcome limits within the society. In a Korean context for considering reunification and making efforts for cooperative co-existence, both governments should strategically think about how to best serve people through good policy.

An example makes this point concrete. If there was an agricultural school in a local area where rice fields and farms were located, if the government allocated funds to expand and link research to the local area, and if the government allowed autonomy for the university to select students appropriate for its research, there could be a chance to avoid or minimize current problems. These problems are emblematic of the country as a whole: an image of local farming areas as old fashioned and not high-tech, of people who are ignorant and conservative, of young people's trend to escape from local areas and move to the capital city, of local areas being empty except for older people, of farming industry having no competitive power relative to other industries. Returning to Dewey's idea, there could have been and could be more diverse interactions and modes of association between an older generation that has accumulated historic knowledge of farming and a newer generation of students.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this two system context of Korean education, a major problem was described: Korean education is isolated, uni-directional and void of various modes of interaction. Here are some suggestions to overcome problems in preparation for reunification. The following conception is designed for a unified education system that emerges from considerations of the Korean context and needs of democracy.

First, evaluation of all spheres of education should be diversified. This is particularly important as there should be less central government control regarding university entrance. This is so that universities can strategically think about what they can do to attract local students and contribute to local industry, which will eventually maximize their own interests – high student enrollment.

Second, the government should hire credible auditing agencies to monitor whether the university is balancing equity and efficiency when selecting students and whether there is corruption throughout the process. When hiring auditing agencies, the government should request bids to procure agencies with the highest credibility and experience. It should also allow international bids so that Korean standards can be compared to those international for improvement and varied association. In this process, unemployed highly educated human resources can be utilized and Korean industry will have the chance to evolve and develop.

Third, to encourage appropriate private sector participation, the government should campaign to encourage employers to hire qualified local students rather than hiring based

primarily on national university name. If necessary, the government could provide learning programs to train in selection procedures. In addition, the government should praise and recognize employers who identify their needs and match them with qualified prospective employees. Through this process, people will learn that ‘university name’ has lesser meaning than the content and level of training that is matched to the specific area and to local needs. In this way, one of the possible problems after reunification, that is that highly educated South Koreans might take over the northern side of Korean economy and industry, can be avoided.

Fourth, the government should encourage high school students to attend their local universities and encourage universities to differentiate student fees between local students and those from other places. To minimize fallout for those who do not have financial support to go to other area universities, the government should make available more funds for education scholarships or student loans with lower interest rates. Governments could also advertise for public education purposes to show examples of students who have received foreign scholarships as well as to allocate funds for coordinators to guide students’ use of international funding sources, such as Rotary Foundation, Ford Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank.

Fifth, the government should encourage the Ministry of Education to be an educational consulting organization that can provide curriculum, textbooks, education methodology and learning strategies upon request to each educational institution. When successful, it could also function as an educational consulting agency for Asia since there are so many Southeast Asian countries monitoring and modeling the success stories of South Korea.

Sixth, the reunified government should also consider consulting and cooperating with international agencies that have accumulated experience and knowledge in shaping national education policy for development, such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organization), OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the World Bank and the ADB (Asian Development Bank). This not only benefits quality education in Korea, but it also benefits people in similar industries to expand their experience and interaction with educational specialists from other locales. Through such interaction, Koreans can expand their experience and competency in international interaction and also expand their modes of association to an international level.

Seventh, the unified Ministry of Education needs to provide empirical evidence of education progress by comparing achievement levels of understanding in specific deliberation contexts. This is fostered through practicing elements such as argumentation, reasoning, yielding to better argument, cooperative group work, and deliberation.

Eighth, after consultation with local governments, community leaders and professionals, the unified government should make lists of local business owners who have shown great performance in their business leadership and management. The government should recognize these businesses and nominate them for their successful and commendable performance, and set up apprenticeships for those who are committed to train local people, and who are willing to learn from local experience. By setting up an apprenticeship with business owners, young people can learn accumulated local know-how in business practices.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The topic of reunification is an on-going discussion between the two Koreas. One cannot disagree that one of the major purposes of Korean reunification is to reduce the tension between them and among their neighboring countries. It is a tension of potential threat that can become violent conflict when things go wrong. To prevent the conflict, peaceful cooperation between the two Koreas is important, and reunification could be a good way to prevent such conflict. In this thesis, the focus has been on a necessary democratic premise for reunification. With it, change in culture alters reform from ‘hard-ware’ reunification that has always been a popular topic between the two Koreas to a ‘soft-ware’ reunification. This means aligning both sides’ positions, interests, cultures, interaction dynamics, experiences and collective habits.

A useful concept closes the thesis that indicates the complexity of reunification. This cannot be minimized, and conflicts in some form seem inevitable. According to Steiner<sup>2</sup> cited above, a “deeply divided society” is where a society has several sub-national identities based on types of criteria, such as language, religion, skin color, history, representative

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<sup>2</sup> Communication in the course, ‘Democracy in Deeply Divided Societies’, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Fall 2005.

organizations and hostility among groups. If the two Koreas were to reunite within the current context and conditions in each society, it would be surprising if there is no conflict. An indicator is recent interaction between resettled North Korean refugees in South Korea and South Koreans. According to a Korean newspaper Segye (2004 a), less than 60 percent of the North Korean refugees in South Korea have jobs. Most of them are living on government subsidies, and more than 60 percent wish to be relocated in a third country because they cannot adjust into South Korean society (see also Segye, 2004 b). There is increasing news about North Koreans victimized or getting involved in criminal activity and adult industry.

In dealing with possible conflict, desirable habits and choices can be experienced, practiced and expanded through unified education. Both of the Korean societies are closely tied with education, and problems in education are closely linked with problems in the society. The problem of both Koreas' education today is that the interaction of interest is limited and it is uni-directional. There are limited modes of association. In a unified Korean education context, problems that can cause future conflict are possibly changed through education firmly based on a concept of democracy. For a future reunified Korea, both Koreas need a new education paradigm that is suitable for a new Korea. Dewey points out that to ensure that ideal values in society become practical and contributory to the broader society, it is important to bring out desirable elements of community life that are actually practiced in the society and use those elements to criticize undesirable features for improvement. He writes,

We must base our conception upon societies which actually exist, in order to have any assurance that our ideal is a practicable one. But, as we have just seen, the ideal cannot simply repeat the traits which are actually found. The problem is to extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which

actually exist, and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement (Dewey, 1916, p. 289).

For peace and development in a unified Korea, Korean philosophy and culture, which is based on Confucianism that was effective for an agricultural society ruled by royal families and the King, needs to be revised so that it can fit into the 21<sup>st</sup> century desire for democracy and a participatory governmental system. This should begin by identifying the needs and interests between people on both sides, as deliberated for the health, development and peace of the Korean peninsula. Finally, in a reunified Korean society education grounded in democracy is an essential method that can bring out desirable aspects, facilitate multi-directional interaction of interests, and allow dynamics and various modes of interactions to evolve in this changing Asian context.



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